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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9649
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5240
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2827
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1123
RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI 0974
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3891
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2282
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2886
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 2839
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001436

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: ASIA FOUNDATION PROGRAM SUCCESSFULLY ASSISTS
MODERATE MUSLIMS

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¶1. (U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified -- Please handle accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Mission has been funding and actively working with The Asia Foundation (TAF) on its Islam and Civil Society (ICS) program. The program--which recently ended--was designed to strengthen key Islamic organizations in their efforts to engage Indonesia's Muslim majority population in the development of democracy and civil society in Indonesia. Most observers believe the program has been a great success in bolstering moderates and serving as a counter to extremists. Though this particular USAID-funded program has ended, TAF--and Mission--remain heavily engaged in working with moderate Muslim groups. END SUMMARY.

A PROGRAM ASSISTING MODERATE MUSLIMS

¶3. (SBU) TAF program directors and other officers recently outlined its ICS program to Mission. The just-completed ICS program received nearly US \$11 million administered by USAID since its inception. The program, according to observers, has been highly successful in strengthening the role of moderate Muslim organizations in Indonesia, engaging civil society and ultimately acting as a counter to extremist groups.

¶4. (SBU) One aspect of TAF's success with the program was to adapt quickly to local sentiment and conditions. The program's original focus was to foster the spread of a moderate form of Islam that worked with democracy. However, after 9/11, TAF--which was taking a bit of a confrontational approach to counter Islamists--came under fire from Islamic groups who began to distrust its intentions. At around this time, for example, TAF published a moderate Muslim magazine meant to specifically counter the radical message being spread in "Sabili"--a conservative Islamic magazine. TAF was threatened by many hardline groups and eventually ceased publication of the magazine.

15. (SBU) In consultation with Mission, TAF soon re-evaluated its strategy and approach and began to center its efforts on the promotion of democracy and good governance, through poverty reduction, education, and women's empowerment. This new strategy resulted in TAF being able to reach out and partner with Islamic organizations in almost every area of its programming. The link with these organizations provided TAF local credibility, moral authority, and the nation-wide structure of these well-established Islamic mass organizations. TAF engaged in significant reform efforts through bringing Muslim leaders together and mobilizing Islamic boarding school (pesantren) networks. These networks developed into avenues that allow Muslim leaders and Islamic boarding schools to dialogue and share information.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE EFFORT

16. (U) As part of the program, TAF engaged in extensive media outreach and training programs. The following are a few recent examples of each:

--Production of a short film entitled "Islamic Philanthropy and Social Development in Contemporary Indonesia." Purpose: raise public understanding of Islamic philanthropy and its use in the pursuit of social justice.

--Twice-monthly radio and television talk show. Purpose: Discuss civic participation in conflict prevention. Partner: Center for Religious and Cultural Studies, Gadjah Mada University.

--Publishing a monthly supplement for a local magazine. Purpose: Showcase themes associated with Islam and

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development issues. Partner: The Wahid Institute.

--Training 60 Islamic school students on various issues including regional legislation and conflict prevention. Partner: International Center for Islam and Pluralism.

--Holding a national conference on Islam, good governance, and poverty in Indonesia for more than 200 representatives from Islamic organizations, local government, NGOs, universities, and the media. Partner: Ma'arif Institute.

--Conducting public discussions on 38 campuses in major cities throughout Indonesia meant to broaden student perspectives on civic rights in contemporary Indonesia.

A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

17. (SBU) Most observers believe the program has been a great success in bolstering moderates and serving as a counter to extremists. TAF's unconventional approach of spreading moderate Islam indirectly through promoting economic development and good governance was counter to methods used by other groups. This approach, however, has successfully gained the trust and support of the two largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, organizations whose joint membership exceeds 75 million Muslims. Though this particular USAID-funded program has ended, TAF--and Mission--remain heavily engaged in working with moderate Muslim groups.

HUME